

An assessment of retention of adolescent girls and young women in HIV prevention interventions under the DREAMS program during the COVID-19 period in Matabeleland south province of Zimbabwe, 2020-2021

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Abstract

Background and objectives

Rapid increase in Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases in Zimbabwe resulted in lockdown measures to curb further transmission. Participation of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) in HIV prevention programs was erratic during lockdown periods due to movement restrictions. We assessed retention in HIV prevention interventions among AGYW aged 10-24 years enrolled in the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe (DREAMS) program from the 1st of October 2020 to the 30th of September 2021 in six districts of Matabeleland south province.

Methods

Secondary analysis of routine program data for AGYW aged 10-24 years enrolled in the DREAMS program in Matabeleland south province was conducted. Data for the period 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021 were extracted from the DREAMS DHIS 2 database and analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. Chi-square test was used to assess differences in retention between different categories of AGYW.

Results

Data for 39,531 AGYW enrolled in the DREAMS programme were analysed and the median age was 16 years (IR, 2). Retention into the DREAMS HIV prevention intervention was 94.8% (37,465/39,531), with the 10–14-year-old AGYW having the highest retention of 96.6% (14,734/39,531). AGYW who were enrolled in school, those who were orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and those aged 10-14 years had higher retention in HIV intervention ($p < 0.001$) than other categories and the difference was statistically significant. Young women selling sex, AGYW living with HIV showed higher retention in HIV prevention than orphans and vulnerable children although the difference was not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$).

Conclusion and recommendations

Retention of AGYW in HIV prevention intervention remained high despite the COVID-19-induced national lockdowns. AGYW aged 10-14- years old, those enrolled in school and OVC showed higher retention. We recommend scaling up the DREAMS HIV prevention strategies employed during the COVID-19 and improve the community HIV prevention strategies to match the in-school component.

Keywords: Retention, DREAMS, sessions, HIV prevention, gender norms